

CORRESPONDENCE.

[Correspondents are requested to write briefly and to the point. No attention will be paid to anonymous communications.]

"A Neglected Branch of Ornithology."

TO THE EDITORS OF THE AUK:—

Dear Sirs: Chief among the reasons, so it seems to the writer, why our younger ornithologists neglect not only the pterylography of birds, but many other equally important branches of ornithology, are the time, care, and patience needed for the prosecution of such work, the labor required for the accumulation of facts, and the difficulty of properly publishing results.

Most workers, especially the younger ones, like to behold the fruits of their labors, and most of them, too, like to see some of these fruits dished up in type. The easiest and quickest means for the accomplishment of these desires is first to 'make a collection' and secondly to publish a 'local list,' and to these ends most of our rising ornithologists devote themselves. Not that this is much to be wondered at, for the work of collecting is pleasant, and the seeking of feathered prizes by wood and stream has a charm about it that few can find in pottering over ill-smelling alcoholics, or tediously dissecting some fresher specimen. The time needed to plot the pterylosis of one bird would make the skins of a score, and give results far more filling to the cabinet and pleasing to the eye.

Does not Dr. Allen, in his note appended to Mr. Clark's letter, tell us of months of toil whose results have never been published, and did not Dr. Allen give up the study of pterylography? And did not Mr. Ridgway give us a most important paper on the osteology of the Falconidæ, and did he ever give us a second?

If, then, acknowledged leaders like these should seem to prefer the external characters of birds, it is small wonder that lesser men should strive to follow in their footsteps. Nevertheless it is a pity, with so much work yet to be done, so many problems still unsolved, that so large a number of our ornithologists should keep on amassing skins, as if that were the chief end of ornithology.

Washington, D. C., Feb. 19, 1893.

FREDERIC A. LUCAS.